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STATE FOR INL/AAE (J LYLE)

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: TEXT FOR 2006 INCSR

REF: STATE 154928

1. Please find below the text for the 2006 INCSR. The format is keyed to the instructions in reftel.

2. I. Summary:

Maldives is not a producer of narcotics or precursor chemicals. The Maldivian government and the U.S. maintain a good working relationship on counter-narcotics issues. Officials estimated that in 2005, upwards of ten percent of the population had used drugs. Reliable statistics are not available, but UNICEF and international law enforcement trainers also report an alarmingly high rate of heroin addiction. The U.S. government has assisted the Maldives in counter-narcotics activities, including via direct training and through the Colombo Plan. In October 2004, the president set up the National Narcotics Control Bureau (NNCB), mandated to coordinate all anti-drug efforts. In September 2005, the Maldivian government initiated a project to have 80 people earn advanced diplomas in anti-narcotics fields. There is minimal evidence to suggest that Maldives is a significant trans-shipment point for narcotics or that Maldives produces or cultivates narcotics.

II. Status of Country:

Maldives is not a producer of narcotics or precursor chemicals. Officials believe that most narcotics trafficked into Maldives are probably for local use, not for transshipment. The Republic of Maldives consists of approximately 1,100 islands set in the Indian Ocean, and has a population of approximately 270,000. Both law enforcement officials and anecdotal evidence suggest that drug addiction has become a major problem in Maldives. Maldivian authorities believe that the drug problem is at the root of most crime in the society. The Maldivian government and the U.S. maintain a good working relationship on counter-narcotics issues.

The Maldivian government is sensitive to the illicit drug issue and is taking steps to address the problem. The government has publicized the penalties for importing drugs to Maldives, including through posters at the international airport. The government conducted a Rapid Situation Assessment of drug abuse, performed in Maldives in 2003 and published in 2004. The study was possible because changes to the narcotics law in 2002 enabled officials to speak with drug abusers without being required to report them. The study confirmed officials' working hypothesis that the majority of drug abusers are in the 18-35 year old category. In the past, the late-teen onset of drug abuse coincided with completion of secondary education and the lack of sufficient employment opportunities for the growing population of young adults. However, UNICEF officers reported that the average age of first use has now dropped to 12. In recent years, drug abuse has shifted from cannabis to unrefined Indian "brown sugar" heroin. UNICEF officers expressed concern that the method of heroin consumption may be shifting from smoking to

injection.

### III. Country Actions against Drugs:

**Policy Initiatives:** In September 2004, the Police Department split from the National Security Service, and the police are responsible for narcotics law enforcement. The Department now has a Narcotics Control Unit staffed by 50 officers. In addition, in October 2004, the president set up a National Narcotics Control Bureau (NNCB), mandated to coordinate anti-drug efforts, promote demand reduction, carry out public education campaigns, and conduct rehabilitation programs.

**Accomplishments:** In August 2005, Deputy Gender and Family Minister Dr. Abdulla Waheed was appointed as the head of the NNCB. In addition, in September 2005, the government initiated a project to have 80 people earn advanced diplomas or Master's degrees in anti-narcotics fields within five years. The NNCB plans to have these practitioners work in atolls where drug addiction rates are high. At present, Maldives has a 150-bed treatment center for both voluntary and involuntary patients in Himmafushi; a new 200-bed wing at this facility should become operational soon, while an additional 100-bed facility in Addu is expected to open by the end of the year. The NNCB employs expatriate healthcare professionals, such as child psychologists, to work at the center. The courts order a large number of addicts to go into rehabilitation, inundating the small facility. At times, the waiting list for the center exceeds the number receiving treatment.

**Law Enforcement Efforts:** Officials state that the large number of incoming foreign workers, mainly South Asians, is one source of drug trafficking. Law enforcement officials have intercepted between two to three kilograms of heroin being trafficked into Maldives annually. Since only small quantities of narcotics are usually trafficked, detection is difficult. There is no evidence at this time suggesting that the Maldives is a significant transshipment point for narcotics. As the country has a large amount of commerce and traffic via the sea, officials believe, however, that most drugs enter the country via small commercial vessels. Police plan to engage vessel operators in deterrence efforts.

Currently, Maldivian authorities do not keep comprehensive statistics of drug seizures/arrests for all agencies in the country. The NNCB is making efforts to collect data on all drug arrests and seizures for future records. Maldives Customs service has tracked and compared Customs seizures and arrests for 2005 and 2006. Even though the total amount of drugs seized is still small, there was marked increase from 2005 to September of 2006. Customs reported an increase from 2005 to 2006 in the number of cases (122% higher in 2006) and drugs seized (297% more drugs seized in 2006). Customs credits the increase on seizures as a result of better information sharing with law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka and India. Some of the larger seizures reported by Maldives Customs in 2006 are detailed below.

In January and February 2006, Maldivian Customs and Police officials reported making six drug-related arrests and seizing 2.4 kilograms of heroin at Hulule International Airport. The arrested individuals included one Pakistani, one Indian, one Sri Lankan, and three Maldivians. In June and July of 2006, approximately 469 grams of heroin was seized at Hulule Airport. In September 466 grams was seized from a marine vessel that had arrived in Male' from India. On April 22, 2006, Maldives Police seized 1.6 tons of hashish in Maldivian territorial waters. The hashish was located approximately two hours north-east of the capital, in approximately 10 meters' depth of water, sunk in 1600 one-kilogram, water-proof packages. According to Maldives Police, the hashish was discovered by a group of lobster fishermen that routinely dive in the area. The fishermen contacted Coast Guard and Maldives security agencies, who took custody of the hashish. Maldives Police and Customs officials are conducting an investigation and have requested U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration assistance. This drug seizure is by far the largest ever reported in the Maldives and is perhaps an early indication of an emerging trend towards transshipment. Maldivian authorities believe that the quantity of hashish is far in excess of requirements for local consumption.

**Corruption:** The government of the Maldives did not, as a matter of

policy, encourage or facilitate the illicit production or distribution of any controlled substances or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions. There were no reports that any senior official engaged in such activity or encouragement thereof. There were no INL-funded aircraft or equipment in country.

**Agreements and Treaties:** The Republic of the Maldives has no extradition treaty with the United States. In 1994, however, the Maldives cooperated with the U.S. in rendering a Nigerian national to the United States to face narcotics trafficking charges. The Maldivian government is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

**Cultivation/Production:** There is no evidence that Maldives produces significant quantities of either drugs or drug precursors.

There are no reports of clandestine or illicit refining.

**Drug Flow/Transit:** There is little evidence at this time suggesting that the Maldives is a significant transshipment point for narcotics. As the country has a large amount of commerce and traffic via the sea, officials believe, however, that most drugs enter the country via small commercial vessels.

#### IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

**Bilateral Cooperation:** The U.S. has assisted the Maldives in counter-narcotics activities, including via direct training and through the Colombo Plan. In 2005, the Colombo Plan conducted a U.S.-funded regional training program in Maldives for public health practitioners. Previous U.S. government funding to the Maldivian government in 1993 created a computerized immigration record-keeping system, in part to track the movements of alleged drug traffickers. The U.S. followed up with additional funding in 1996 to enhance the system.

**Road Ahead:** The U.S. government intends to maintain its commitment to aiding the Maldivian government in combating drug abuse. The U.S. expects to continue its support of the Colombo Plan.

BLAKE